

Office of National Drug Control Policy

Drug Policy Information Clearinghouse

Puerto Rico

Profile of Drug Indicators

September 1999



ONDCP Drug Policy Information Clearinghouse staff compiled this profile by using the most recent data available from open sources. The data presented are as accurate as the sources from which they were drawn. The information contained in this profile should not be used to rank or compare States or jurisdictions, due to differences in data collection and reporting methods.

Puerto Rico

The following profile contains information on demographics, political figures, programs, crime, drug use, drug trafficking, and enforcement statistics.

Demographics¹

- Population: 3,857,070 (1998 estimate)
- Gender: 48.3% Male, 51.7% Female
- Age: 24% 0-14 years old, 65% 15-64 years old, 11% 65 years and older
- Unemployment Rate: 13% (FY96/97 estimate)
- Economy: Puerto Rico has one of the most dynamic economies in the Caribbean region. A diverse industrial sector has surpassed agriculture as the primary locus of economic activity and income. U.S. firms have invested heavily in Puerto Rico since the 1950's.
- Geography: Puerto Rico is located in the Caribbean between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic, east of the Dominican Republic. The terrain is mostly mountains with a coastal plain belt in north; mountains precipitous to sea on west coast; and sandy beaches along most coastal areas. Puerto Rico is an important location along the Mona Passage—a key shipping lane to the Panama Canal; San Juan is one of the biggest and best natural harbors in the Caribbean; many small rivers and high central mountains ensure land is well watered; south coast relatively dry; fertile coastal plain belt in north

Politics

- Puerto Rico is a commonwealth associated with the United States.
- Governor: Pedro Rossello
- U.S. House Member: Carlos Romero-Barcelo (D)
- HIDTA Director: Jose M. Alvarez

Programs/Initiatives

- The Puerto Rico/U.S. Virgin Islands HIDTA, designated in 1994 is the closest point of entry into the United States for Latin American drug traffickers and therefore is a major trans-shipment point for illegal drugs. This HIDTA consists of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands and includes the islands of Puerto Rico, Vieques, Culebra, St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John.²
- Alliance for a Drug-Free Puerto Rico recently announced receiving 1 million dollars from ONDCP to go towards anti drug media messages. The ads will appear during prime time and be aimed at middle school aged and pre-adolescent children.³

Crime and Drug-Related Crime

- There has been an overall reduction of felonies committed on the island of Puerto Rico. The murder rate is still the highest in the world per capita but there was a drop of 27% from 502 murders in FY97 to 365 murders in the first half of FY98. Approximately 90% of all violent crimes and 75-80% of all documented homicides in Puerto Rico during FY98 were considered drug related. The decrease in violent

crimes did not occur in San Juan, the number of murders increased 5.5% and occurred in or around the cities many drug areas.⁴

- A survey of Puerto Rico's residents showed that crime and public safety (43%) was considered a major problem to Puerto Rico, followed by drugs (18%), HIV (9%), and the economy (5%).⁵

- The following is an excerpt from the Governors State of the Island Address in January 1998:

"Already we see the unequivocal results of the will of our people to control crime and violence.

- Type 1 crimes have been reduced by 26% compared with 1992. This means 93 fewer crimes every day, 650 fewer every week.
- Violent crimes have declined by almost 13,000 annually, to levels not seen since 1984 -- 39% less than five years ago, 244 fewer violent crimes per week, and 35 fewer per day.
- Robberies are down by 43.7%, eliminating almost one of every two.
- Rape is down 35.8%, to an incidence that hadn't been seen since 1958.
- Crimes against property are 24% lower.
- Statistics in all the categories are lower, including murder -- for the first time in a dramatic form -- which is down to a level of 141 fewer killings than in 1992. That is 16% lower and it translates to 12 fewer brothers being murdered every month.

Much of this has been accomplished by working in a creative and modern way, using new technology and resources to the maximum.

- For example, the Foot Patrol program of the urban and commercial centers is carried out by 300 officers, many on bicycles.
- An innovative program will soon be added for shopping centers and tourist areas, with police on roller-skates.
- 192 mounted police have already been located in 11 areas, giving new life to the Mounted Police of Puerto Rico. To this successful program we are going to add seven new units with 257 horses more.
- The Canine Unit offers such good service with 41 dogs that we are going to add 66 more, all prepared for the most delicate and special vigilance, rescue and detection.
- The computerized 9-1-1 system will allow us to hone our efficiency in giving rapid service during emergencies of health or security. This system will be linked to a sophisticated network of emergency and patrol vehicles, permitting the immediate localization of the service unit closest to the occurrence.
- To scrutinize our coasts and drug areas, where crime is high, we will use small planes operated by remote control and equipped with powerful video cameras.
- Likewise, we will place video cameras in high-crime areas as a preventive measure and for timely response when crimes do occur.
- To stop the illegal entry of drugs and arms in freight cars through our ports, we are going to install new technology that permits rapid inspection via X-rays to detect illegal cargo.
- The 35 boats of the maritime unit of the United Rapid Action Forces (FURA by its Spanish acronym) will be reinforced with six additional craft.

- To the 13 helicopters in service, another four new units will be added.
- The FURA radar system will also be reinforced by mobile radar units on trucks, which will permit us to concentrate our efforts in specific areas.

With measures like these, we are telling the criminal, the drug-trafficker and the delinquent that we are not going to back down and we are prepared to use all the human and technological resources available to destroy their macabre means.

I would like for all of us to reaffirm our commitment: This fight goes on and will continue until we don't have to lament even one single death, one single robbery, one single rape, one single crime."

Drug Use⁶

- CEWG Report excerpt..."The Puerto Rico Epidemiology Work Group on drug abuse meeting was held in San Juan on January 27-28, 1998. Data from multiple indicators showed several major drug abuse patterns across the entire island. Heroin continues to be a major problem, both in terms of abuse and trafficking of the drug. Heroin purity levels are high and prices are relatively low. Opiates account for a substantial percentage of overdose deaths, often in combination with cocaine and/or alcohol. Abuse of cocaine hydrochloride (HCL), while still high, declined from 1993–1996. Trafficking continues to be a problem. Purity of cocaine HCL is high and prices have declined. The abuse of crack cocaine steadily increased from 1990–1996. Over the nine treatment regions served by the Mental Health and Anti-Addiction Services Administration, the north East San Juan area had the highest reported use of crack among admissions over a 7-year period, despite declines in 1995–1996. Second was Caguas in the East until 1996 when Arecibo in the north Central area ranked second in reported use of crack. In the other six treatment regions, use of crack among admissions increased steadily from 1990–1996; the increases were typically greatest in 1996. Field reports indicate that many crack uses are youth who have not entered treatment. Marijuana abuse appears to be increasing. A higher percentage of treatment admission reported use of marijuana in 1996 than in the previous 2 years. A majority of drug abusers who apply for treatment use multiple drugs— usually heroin, cocaine HCL, crack, or marijuana. High rates of drug injection continue to place users at risk for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection, although rates of injection have remained fairly stable since 1989."

Drug Trafficking

- The Puerto Rico/ US Virgin Island HIDTA Threat Abstract states..."The islands comprising the Puerto Rico/U.S. Virgin Islands HIDTA are the closest points of entry into the United States for drug traffickers from Latin America. The HIDTA consists of the islands of Puerto Rico, Vieques, Culebra, St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John. The islands include over 583 miles of coastline with several maritime ports including San Juan, which is the most active port of entry in the Caribbean area. Between 10 to 13 metric tons of cocaine arrive via maritime shipments to Puerto Rico on a monthly basis. It is estimated that 85% to 90% are subsequently transported to the United States. Approximately 40,000 cargo containers arrive at San Juan's port of entry each

month; and only 1% to 3% of shipments are inspected. Cocaine, marijuana and heroin are the primary drug threats. Over 50,000 persons are addicted to an illegal drug. Approximately 85% of all violent crimes in Puerto Rico are drug related. The region is faced with police and public corruption. There are at least 85 major drug trafficking organizations. Drug money going back to drug source countries is estimated at one-half billion dollars to Colombian Cartels and one-half billion dollars to the Dominican Republic."⁷

- In the first 3 quarters of FY1998 the Puerto Rico/US Virgin Island HIDTA (PR/USVI HIDTA) arrested 225 individuals and seized \$8,375,000 in assets and currency.⁸

Domestic Drug Seizures PR/USVI HIDTA⁸

Drug	1998*	1997
Cocaine	13,638.27 kilograms	10,912.23 kilograms
Heroin	31.56 kilograms	46.63 kilograms
Marijuana	756.09 kilograms	1,272.28 kilograms

* As of August 31 1998

Asset Seizures and Arrests PR/USVI HIDTA⁸

SEIZURES	Fiscal Year 1998
Vessels	14
Vehicles	24
Weapons	43
US Currency	\$1,234,719
Real Estate Assets	12
Total Assets (\$ value)	\$8,375,000
ARRESTS	
US Citizens	163
Aliens	62
Total Arrests	225

Sources

¹ Central Intelligence Agency, *World Fact Book 1998* Online at <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>

² ONDCP Web site: <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov>

³ Puerto Rico/US Virgin Island HIDTA, *FY 1998 Annual Report*, 1998

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Puerto Rico, *1997 Statewide Strategy Puerto Rico Drug and Violent Crime Control*, 1997

⁶ Community Epidemiology Working Group, *Epidemiologic Trends in Drug Abuse, Advanced Report December 1998*, 1998

⁷ ONDCP HIDTA Web section: <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/enforce/hidta.html>

⁸ Puerto Rico/US Virgin Island HIDTA, *FY 1998 Annual Report*, 1998

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The Drug Policy Information Clearinghouse
PO Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849-6000
1-800-666-3332
<http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov>
ondcp@ncjrs.org

